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Letter dated 28 November 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The 2008 Zaragoza International Exhibition on the theme of "Water and Sustainable Development" was held from 14 June to 14 September 2008. Some 104 countries together with a number of international organizations, including from the United Nations system, participated.

The Spanish Government was especially honoured by the visit which you paid, on behalf of the United Nations, to the Zaragoza Exhibition. Your visit was one of the many paid to the Exhibition by Heads of State and Government of countries all over the world.

At the closing session of the Zaragoza Exhibition, a summary was presented of the work done by the Water Tribune, in which more than 2,000 eminent persons and experts from various countries of the world participated. Participants discussed and elaborated proposals to overcome the major water-related challenges that face humanity now and in the future.

The outcome of the working sessions of the Water Tribune was the so-called "2008 Zaragoza Charter", which summarizes the conclusions arrived at by the scientists and experts in attendance and reflects their position on the various aspects of a question of such importance as water and sustainable development (see annex).

I am pleased to attach herewith the text of the "2008 Zaragoza Charter" and request that you kindly circulate this letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 49, and of the Economic and Social Council.

(*Signed*) Juan Antonio **Yáñez-Barnuevo**

08-64621 (E) 181208 191208

Annex to the letter dated 28 November 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English]

The 2008 Zaragoza Charter

The 2008 Zaragoza International Exhibition was the first ever to exclusively deal with "Water and Sustainable Development". The 2008 Expo was a great international event held on the banks of the River Ebro in which 104 countries, three international organisations, and all of Spain's autonomous communities and cities took part.

Following the guidelines set by the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE), the Exhibition at all stages tied in with the work of the United Nations on water.

The Exhibitions, which are run in the spirit of the aims of the BIE, have become international events that obtain more direct participation from everyday citizens and are a prodigious exercise in civic education. At the International Zaragoza Exhibition, millions of visitors have gained a deeper insight into the planet's water and sustainable development problems.

As the scientific and technical platform for the 2008 Zaragoza Expo, the Water Tribune served as a stage to disseminate knowledge transfer, and gave rise to debates and proposals to overcome the major water-related challenges that face humanity now and in the future. Throughout the 93 days that sessions were held, the Tribune was the largest, all-embracing international event on Water and Sustainable Development.

The Water Tribune's activities came to an end two days ago with the presentation of its conclusions, and today at this closing ceremony it is to present its final analysis in the shape of the 2008 Zaragoza Charter.

Preamble. A new comprehensive vision of water

Those of us who have been involved with the Water Tribune are well aware that water is essential to life and to the planet.

New paradigms on water and sustainable development aim to supersede a purely anthropocentric viewpoint by positing that the integrated management of water resources will ensure the survival of the human race and protect the planet.

Considering:

1 That the Earth's water and ecosystems must be preserved and protected.

2 That access to drinking water and sanitation is a human right that must be guaranteed by all public authorities.

3 That by accepting Millennium Development Goals, the Earth's nations have pledged a serious commitment to water-related issues.

4 That access to water has an enormous influence on development.

5 That water plays a fundamental role in the production and transfer of energy.

6 That there will be an ever-increasing demand for water, mainly due to the growth of the population and the economy, all of which may result in a bigger "water footprint".

7 That forecasts show that climate change is capable of modifying the availability and demand for water all over the planet.

8 That current technologies make it possible to produce fresh water from sea water and fog, as well as to regenerate and reuse it, at reasonable prices and with less environmental impact.

9 That the durability and transformation of rural areas are directly linked to the availability and sustainable use made of water.

10 That the sustainable production of food is directly linked to the efficient use of water.

11 That education, culture, communications and participation must form the basis of the transformation in the management of the world's water resources.

12 That it is essential to strengthen all levels of governance in order to bring about integrated water management and sustainability, which implies the greater participation and sharing of responsibilities by society.
13 That river basins are the best suited environments for harnessing water and their good management makes it possible to resolve conflicts between countries, regions and users.
14 That ensuring channels of financing and ways of sharing financial risks, using criteria of sustainability, is essential to the success of initiatives and actions in the water sector.
15 That the investment in water infrastructures in developing countries is essential in order to reduce poverty and to bring about economic growth and that current levels of investment fall short of those set by the Millennium Development Goals.
16 That the public authorities must take the initiative in promoting the legislation and arrangements required to ensure access to water by all.
17 That research, development and innovation are the cornerstones that underpin our knowledge, solutions, well-being and sustainability in water-related issues.

The Water Tribune RECOMMENDS:

A. AS GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

A1 That the development of societies should be based on sustainable and environmentally friendly criteria.
A2 That priorities must be set and commitments made with regard to water that are in the general interests of humanity, and that are founded on ethical sustainability principles, transparency, and intra- and inter-generational equality.
A3 That water management schemes should promote community participation, efficiency and solidarity through shared knowledge and experiences, whose end purpose is to being about individual and collective awareness.
A4 That commitments and regulations should be established to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and extreme weather events, and to adapt to such circumstances.
A5 That solutions and water management schemes must adapt to the rate of development, the culture, the social environment and economic climate of each region and society.
A6 That the basic management units of water resources should be river basins and aquifers, even in cases in which they are of a supranational nature.
A7 That every individual must have access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation, both in rural and urban areas, through the acceptance of global commitments, the setting of realistic targets and the adoption of specific solutions.
A8 That the supply of drinking water and the collection and treatment of wastewater are priority issues. Public administrations must provide these services at a fair price and also be in a position to cover their costs.
A9 That the management of demand must be at least as important and the management of offer in decisions on policies, strategies, plans, programmes and budgets.
A10 That the research, development and innovation in water-related technologies must be encouraged, and that the transfer of results and benefits to society must be speeded up.
A11 That a World Water Agency must be set up whose main missions would be:

a To draw up and present the Charter of the Rights and Responsibilities of Human Beings with Water to the United Nations.
b To devise a universal framework of standards on water within the context of sustainable development that is recognised by all countries.
c To prepare and promote the development of the International Convention on Climate Change, Extreme Weather Events and Risk Management for dealing with water resources.
d To encourage the approval of the International Protocol for the Pacific and Productive Management of Cross-border River Basins in the world.
e To help countries that ask for support in the integrated management of water.
f To foster the knowledge, principles and values, in coherence with the above, that will lead to acceptable ethics of water.

g To promote the efficient and global dissemination and exchange of good practices, lessons learnt, models, reproducible processes and experiences that have been successful, and to issue recommendations though an information and knowledge transfer centre about water and sustainable development.
h To encourage alliances between the public and private sectors that make it possible to join forces so that universal water supplies and sanitation become a reality.

B. TO THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, USERS OF WATER AND CITIZENS

B1 That ecosystems be effectively protected for their intrinsic values and to guarantee the durability of sources of water.
B2 That basic sanitation and wastewater treatment services be provided to match local realities, which attain world standards of sanitation that ensure health, hygiene and well-being.
B3 That measures be adopted to guarantee a basic water supply to all homes or as close to them as possible. In situations of poverty, governments must guarantee a minimum supply of water.
B4 That legal systems and the regulations drawn up take non-detrimental cultural habits and the ancestral rights of local communities into consideration.
B5 That the management of public water and sanitation services be under the control of public authorities.
B6 That the demand for water should be monitored to fit in with educational, informational, participative and tariff-based criteria.
B7 That delays in water supplies reaching rural areas should be shortened through the exchange of experiences and participative management schemes, which should be adapted to and accepted by the communities using them.
B8 That technologies be promoted and applied to bring about water savings, desalination and sea water applications, the harvesting of fog and rain, and the purification, regeneration and reuse of water. Such technologies should be energy-efficient with a low environmental impact in order to reach sustainable energy targets.
B9 That given the anticipated figures in population growth, countries should consider agriculture to be both an economic and strategic sector.
B10 That measures be devised and disseminated to improve irrigation systems through a more efficient use of water energy.
B11 That viable funding schemes with guarantees be drawn up between countries and institutions. They should provide for the possibility of attracting capital from the market for investments in the water infrastructures necessary to provide public supply and sanitation services, as well as attracting the human resources required to do so.
B12 That rational economic criteria be applied that promote efficiency and sustainability, which should likewise adopt the principles of social and environmental justice in the management of water.
B13 That integrated policies be set to facilitate the allocation of water for its various uses, providing that in doing so economic efficiency and environmental quality are favoured.
B14 That all citizens share the responsibility of the integrated management of water and sustainability.
B15 That citizens come to realise that water is the heritage of all living beings, not just a resource for human use.

ZARAGOZA 2008: AN EXPO WITHOUT AN EXPIRY DATE

In order to promote its recommendations, this 2008 Zaragoza Charter will be entrusted to the Secretariat General of the United Nations Organisation, the International Exhibitions Bureau and the Government of Spain.

All of the documents on which this Charter is based — speeches, debates, analyses and conclusions — are kept, as a heritage to be shared, in various appendices to the *Legado* (Legacy) and the *Caja Azul* (Blue Box), which shall be left in the custody of Spain, as the host country of the 2008 International Exhibition.

Zaragoza, 14 de September 2008
Closing Day of the 2008 Zaragoza International Exhibitions

ZAŞAGOZA 2008: AN EXPO WITHOUT AN EXPIRY DATE

THE 2008 ZARAGOZA CHARTER